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SitRep as of 0500

Bunker had three meetings on the morning of October 31 (Saigon time):

1. Thieu (forty minutes). Bunker put the case in the most forceful, sympathetic but unrelenting terms. Bunker cannot tell us what Thieu's decision will be: he was obviously rocked, but there was no time for Thieu to give a considered view. Thieu said he would call a meeting that afternoon of the National Security Council and the two heads of Parliament. Thieu asked Bunker to explain to Thanh the US position on a) the GVN taking the lead on matters concerning it, b) our offer to have private meetings with Hanoi before the firm meeting, c) "the question of the other side." (Saigon 41586)

2. Thanh (at 1100). Bunker went over his instructions, answered three questions (on GVN taking the lead, how we would deal with internal SVN matters at a conference in view of GVN position they would refuse to discuss these, whether we would discuss procedures with the DRV before direct talks begin), read the key sentence on the NLF from the President's talk to the nation, and went over the time schedule. Bunker stressed 1) our hope to have the GVN with us, but our determination to go ahead without them if necessary, 2) the imperative need for tight security (Saigon 41618).

3. Ky (at 1145 for almost an hour). Ky recognized that if the GVN agreed to talk with Hanoi the NLF will have to be present, and there will have to be concessions. He would use his influence in the Security Council meeting to persuade the Council of the necessity for moving together with the U.S. On the basis of Ky's statesmanlike presentation, Bunker believes there is a better than 50-50 chance the NSC will go along with us. (Saigon 41589)

As of 0635 - Ambassador Bunker telephoned to say that the NSC meeting was still in session; he would see Thieu immediately after it ended and would phone us right away.

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B.H.R.

Benjamin H. Read
Executive Secretary

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